



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release to AM's OF WEDNESDAY, MAY 28, 1947

BLACK DOUGLAS BEGINS FUR-SEAL STUDIES IN NORTH PACIFIC

Equipped as a floating laboratory, the motorship Black Douglas has left Seattle, Wash., for North Pacific waters to study the migration routes and food habits of the Alaska fur-seal herd that has its breeding grounds on the Pribilof Islands in Bering Sea, according to an announcement made today by Albert M. Day, Director, Fish and Wildlife Service.

The expedition, in charge of Dr. Victor B. Scheffer, Service biologist, will spend the next 11 months seeking new data on where the seals go when they leave the Pribilof Islands, what food they eat, and whether the young seals are preyed upon by other marine mammals.

On recommendation of the Department of State, the Fish and Wildlife Service began an investigation in 1941 to obtain scientific data regarding the migration routes and food habits of the seals. The necessity for inaugurating this investigation was due to the formal notice served by the Japanese Government that on October 23, 1941, it would abrogate the Fur Seal Treaty of 1911 which prohibited pelagic sealing--the killing, capturing, or pursuing of the animals at sea. The United States, Great Britain, and Russia, as well as Japan, were signatories to this treaty.

As the reason for cancelling the treaty, Japan claimed that the fur-seal herd, at least in part, migrated down the Asiatic shore and was damaging Japan's fishing industry. The findings of early investigators on the North American side, however, did not agree with this contention. The State Department then recommended that the Fish and Wildlife Service bring up to date its scientific data on seals to determine the validity of Japan's claims.

The Black Douglas, a former schooner yacht, was purchased by the Service in 1941 by a special Congressional appropriation and all required repairs and alterations were made at Savannah, Ga., to place make it sea-worthy. Before the vessel reached Seattle, war was declared and the seal investigation was discontinued. The Black Douglas was requisitioned by the Navy and served during the war as a Navy patrol vessel.

After its return to the Service, the vessel was refitted in Seattle and made its "shake-down" cruise in April in waters off the Olympic Peninsula of Washington. It carries a crew of 15.

From Seattle the Black Douglas will follow the fur seal herd on the spring migration to its breeding grounds, conduct sealing and tagging operations on and around the islands, and later in the fall will follow the herd south to continue the study of migration routes to winter waters. Extensive studies of the stomach contents of the seals will be carried on to determine if they are feeding upon valuable commercial food fishes.

The Black Douglas and its crew will be used also to gather information on other marine life such as killer whales, hair seals, sea lions, and sea otters to ascertain if any of these mammals prey upon the young seals after they leave the islands on their winter migration.

Since the Government assumed direct control of the fur-seal herd in 1910, the number of animals has increased from 132,279 to 3,386,000 in 1946. The herd now has a capital value in excess of \$100,000,000.

x x x